

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Farming Lease – Amelia Island Wildlife Management Area

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

The 86-acre Amelia Island WMA was purchased by FWP to maintain a riparian/cropland habitat complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while enhancing public hunting opportunities. The proposed action is to continue a share-crop arrangement for one year on 30 acres of cropland. The fields in the proposed project area have traditionally been used for agricultural production. As proposed, the lessee would cultivate, plant, and retain a portion (75 percent) of the grain crop harvest, leaving the remaining crop (25 percent) standing for wildlife during winter months. The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage, primarily for wintering pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Standing and harvested crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The Environmental Assessment for the project was released on Feb.7, with comments accepted through Feb. 28. FWP did not receive any comment in regards to the agricultural lease. FWP issued its decision notice on March 5 in support of the agricultural lease, contingent on Commission approval.

Alternatives and Analysis

Under the "no action" alternative, agricultural lands will not be cultivated and FWP would need to commit resources to manage weeds on the previously cultivated 30 acres of farm fields, and wildlife would be negatively impacted by lack of wintering habitat and forage resources. Renewing the agricultural lease, however, will benefit wildlife by providing high-quality forage and wintering habitat and continued hunting opportunity for deer and pheasant with little expense to FWP.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the agricultural lease on Amelia Island WMA, which would provide necessary winter forage for wildlife and promote quality hunting opportunities for sportsmen and -women.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve the agricultural lease on Amelia Island WMA.